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Survival and loss of Old English religious vocabulary between 1150 and 1350

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ABSTRACT

Middle English religious vocabulary is radically different from that of the previous period: while Old English is characterised more by lexical pattern replication of Latin (and Greek) etyma, Middle English is the period of matter replication. Due to the intake of new French religious words, English lexemes and also whole word families undergo semantic transformation and lexical replacement. Other terms, however, survive from the Old English period into the present day, resisting contact-induced pressure. This study shows that the survival of old lexemes into Middle English is largely determined by the extent of their diffusion and frequency of occurrence before the Norman Conquest. It is postulated that two kinds of inherited Old English lexis should be distinguished in the Middle English period: 1) established terms that had belonged to the West Saxon standard and were still preserved in general use by the lower regular clergy, parish priests, and the faithful at large, and 2) terms of limited currency that had failed to spread outside local communities with strong ties and survived for a short time after the Conquest in smaller religious foundations. The innovation and spread of new francophone religious lexis was conditioned by the new preaching practices that began to develop in Europe in the wake of the Fourth Lateran Council and the emergence of mendicant orders. Preachers of the new type were the multilingual innovators who generated new lexis in English and at the same time were instrumental in its diffusion, serving as weak ties between the various levels of the medieval society. Urban middle classes, on the other hand, were the most likely English-speaking early adopters of new norms.

KEYWORDS

Old English, Middle English, French, religious vocabulary, social networks

1 INTRODUCTION

One of the cruxes of English historical lexicography in the field of religious loans is the seemingly radical reorientation of lexical borrowing strategies between Old and Middle English: while the former period seems to be characterised by lexical pattern replication displayed in semantic extensions and various kinds of loan translations and formations, the later period is more straightforwardly one of matter replication (cf. Käsmann 1961: 6). In the religious domain, not only individual lexemes but also whole word families may undergo semantic transformation and lexical replacement. For example, such core lexemes as *gospel* or *Easter* compete with *evangelium* and *pasque* and eventually survive, while dozens of other old religious terms are replaced with newer loans: *fulluht* by *baptism*, *leorningcniht* by *disciple*. Some of them, such as *hælend* ‘Saviour; Jesus’ become obsolete already by c.1250, while others, such as *dryhten* ‘the Lord’ linger until c.1500. Just how this competition is resolved in early Middle English is the focus of the present paper.

My departure point is Hans Käsmann’s 1961 study of church vocabulary in early Middle English, which offers both an exceptionally detailed account of lexical replacement and growth in several subdomains of religious lexis and a meaningful sociolinguistic introduction to important developments within the language and language-related practices after the Norman Conquest and up to 1350. I further rely on the electronic resources of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), the *Historical Thesaurus of the Oxford English Dictionary* (HTOED), the *Dictionary of Old English* (DOE), the *Middle English Dictionary* (MED), and *A Linguistic Atlas of Early Middle English 1150 to 1325* (LAEME) and analyse their data in the light of more recent research into social change within the church and educational system after 1066 (Orme 1973, 2006). By applying the sociolinguistic frameworks of social networks, communities of practice and discourse communities (Timofeeva 2017a,b), I connect lexical innovation to changing patterns of school education, i.e. the

increasing importance of cathedral schools and of French as the language of instruction, and to changing patterns of preaching, i.e. the spread of the mendicant orders in the thirteenth century. The argumentation of this paper is based on four premises: i) that religious lexis should be divided into common terms and professional terms, ii) that OE word frequencies can predict the survival of lexemes into early ME, iii) that several individual instances of lexical innovation can be observed in largely the same geographical regions, and iv) that lexical innovation in the religious domain is part of the more general social innovation of the early to mid 13th century triggered by the decisions of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) and the spread of the mendicant orders in England in the 1220s (see also Ingham this volume). These central points will be explained in the course of the article and illustrated with examples and maps; a few important exceptions will also be addressed.

1.1 *Previous research on religious vocabulary in early Middle English*

While there are many studies that address lexical growth and lexical loss in the ME period (Dekeyser 1986; Dekeyser & Pauwels 1990; Chase 1988; Coleman 1995; Durkin 2014 among others), Hans Käsman's monograph on religious vocabulary in early ME remains the most comprehensive diachronic study that approaches this particular domain from an onomasiological perspective and reconstructs developments within individual semantic fields. Käsman lists a total of 22 scenarios that are possible for religious lexis during the period between 1100 and 1350 (1961: 34–37): four of them concern native English vocabulary and 18 Romance loan vocabulary, mainly French loanwords. In the first category, he talks about: 1) lexemes with 'constant' semantics that stay so in ME (*bishop*); 2) lexemes with less constant semantics that undergo semantic change in ME but nevertheless remain in use (*belief* and *truth* after the introduction of *faith*); 3) lexemes that die out and whose place is filled by loans prior to c.1350; and 4) lexemes that die out and whose place is filled by loans after c.1350. Similarly, in the second category (Romance loans), Käsman

gives a combination of semantic and diachronic observations on borrowing: the lexemes are distinguished according to whether or not they express new cultural concepts (*friar*, *pardon*), have stable, ambiguous (*love* vs. *charity*) or obsolescent (*givernesse* vs. *gluttony*) English counterparts, or belong to a lexical field together with other etymologically related Romance terms (*prophecy*, *prophecy*, *prophet*). A number of categories also relate to the discourse and poetic functions of the loans, such as their use as swear words (*deu* in *depardeus* or *parde*) or use chiefly in rhyming positions (*omnipotent*, *virginity*).

Among these lexical scenarios, I am primarily interested in those that involve native-based formations (loan translations and semantic loans) which were borrowed and established in the OE period, but later on, came to be replaced by French and Latin direct loans. Such examples can be found throughout Käsman's book. The bulk of his analysis of church vocabulary consists of a series of case studies grouped into several categories of religious terms and their lexical fields: terms that denote the deity and trinity; heavenly hierarchy (angels, saints, prophets, etc.); faith and Christianity; heresies, paganism and hell; passion and martyrdom; grace, mercy and forgiveness; salvation, bliss and glory; the sacraments; virtues; sins; clergy and church hierarchy; monks and monasticism; and religious feasts. Each item is accompanied by a brief account of its origins in OE or another source language, a description of ME developments and a few examples of usages in ME texts. If a native-based term happens to be replaced by a French (more typically) or Latin one, or, exceptionally, the other way round, Käsman speculates on the possible reasons and scenarios to explain why and how this could have taken place.

As this detailed catalogisation of subdomains and diachronic developments suggests, individual word and subdomain histories are in many respects self-explanatory and self-sufficient for Käsman. Although his book opens with a helpful general discussion of the sociolinguistic (as we would now call it) situation of the early Middle English period, which gives a thorough state-

of-the-art survey of lexicographic research up to the late 1950s and expresses a well-founded dissatisfaction with the uncritical treatment of all French loans in the literature as necessarily political-dominance and cultural-prestige related, the mass of the book addresses a different problem. Käsmann laments the disproportionate attention that was (and still is sometimes) paid to the growth of the English lexicon through borrowing and the neglect of native vocabulary and the history of its survival into the Middle English and also later periods (19–21). His response to this problem is laudable and monumental – his thesaurus-like monograph¹ is exhaustive in its treatment of the semantic fields of native and borrowed religious terms, and the question of what happens to individual words and how the changes occur is answered from within the language system with remarkable precision. However, the societal dimension is largely missing in the practical chapters, and the book ends without a summary or conclusion.

Although a lot has been done to enrich our understanding of individual word histories in the ME period since 1961 (as the bibliographies in Sylvester & Roberts 2000 and Heidemanns 2005: §34 show), it is only more recently that we have developed a better vision of the sociolinguistic interplay between English and French and, in particular, of the status and sustainability of French in medieval England (Rothwell 1998; Trotter 2003; Wogan-Browne et al. 2009; Ingham 2012; etc.), and have begun to apply sociolinguistic tools to the history of the medieval English lexicon (Lenker 2000; Timofeeva 2017a,b). This study aims to take up these new frameworks and relate the changes within religious vocabulary to the social networks of the clergy and especially to weak ties between the clergy and the laity.

¹ The only work that surpasses Käsmann in scope is Chase (1988) *Religious English Lexis*, which was intended as part of the *Historical Thesaurus of English*, covering the entire history of the domain.

1.2 *Data and method*

The question of why some OE religious terms survive and others become obsolete is in this article answered from the point of view of word frequencies. It is shown that words with 500+ occurrences in the DOEC have a much better chance of being used in ME, and even today, than those with lower frequencies. This, in turn, is connected to the spread of religious vocabulary beyond professional usage to lay English-speaking communities at large. A selection of such terms is considered in detail against the case studies in Käsman (1961), first and last attestations in OED and MED, and onomasiological data in HTOED.

The raw data for this study comes from the DOE, A to H (52 headwords with 500+ frequencies), based on the DOEC corpus files of over 3 million words and LAEME, 1150–1325, with a total word count of c.650,000 words. The advantage of using an atlas survey as an early ME corpus is that it allows a time-efficient analysis of text files, for which all the sources have been newly transcribed, and all words (excluding proper names) lemmatised and tagged. LAEME lexical searches can be mapped and cross-tabulated chronologically so that the geographical diffusion of new lexis and the obsolescence of the old can be illustrated visually. Inevitably, some shortcomings are associated with both resources: no mapping function is available for DOE or DOEC, while in LAEME, not all source texts are included in their entirety – from those that are over c.15,000 words long and survive in multiple copies, only samples were included by the compilers (Laing & Lass: 2007b: §3.1). Thus, establishing the geographical diffusion of lexemes prior to 1150 and obtaining complete counts of occurrences between 1150 and 1325 remains an impossibility. A few other technical problems are addressed in the relevant sections of the article.

2 ANALYSIS

2.1 *Old English frequencies as predictors of lexical survival*

In my recent study of the diffusion of Latinate lexis in Old English (Timofeeva 2017b), I argue that high-frequency loanwords are more likely to survive into the Middle English period. This applies, for example to *god-spell* with over 900 attestations in the DOE, but not to *cȳþere* ‘witness; martyr’ that occurs only c.100 times in the same corpus.² Although the limitations and under-representativeness of the extant Old English texts with their focus on religious matters and narratives have to be borne in mind (Timofeeva 2017a,b), the number of occurrences in Old English is typically a good predictor of the survival chances of individual lexemes into the later periods. For the present study, to verify this point further, I solicited the assistance of the DOE team to generate a list of religious words that are attested more than 500 times in the DOEC.³ As the lemmatisation of the corpus is still an ongoing process, the list that I obtained contains headwords only from A to H (Table 1). Nevertheless, generalisations about the Old English lexicon are possible even at this incomplete stage. I reproduce the list here, in descending order by number of occurrences.

Table 1. *Old English headwords with 500+ occurrences (based on DOE, A to H)*

Headword with no. of occurrences	Last attestation in OED/MED	Headword with no. of occurrences	Last attestation in OED/MED
god ‘god, deity; the God’: 33,000		andett(i)an ‘to confess’: 1,250	a1225(c1200)
dryhten ‘lord, ruler; the Lord’: 15,500	1572 (a1500)	cristen ‘Christian’: 1,100	

² As in Timofeeva (2017b), I use the term *loanword* broadly and extend it to semantic loans and loan translations to include any word or phrase that lexicalises in a recipient language under the situation of contact with a source language.

³ I gratefully acknowledge the help of Antonette diPaolo Healey, Stephen Pelle, and Xin Xiang.

hālig ‘holy’: 8,400	bletsian ‘to bless; consecrate; extol’: 1,100
crist ‘Christ; Messiah’: 5,500	abbod ‘abbot’: 1,100
hælend ‘Saviour, Jesus’: 5,000;	c1275(?a1200) / c1250 blissian, blīpsian ‘to rejoice; gladden’: 1,000 1634
heofon(e) ‘heaven; sky’: 4,100	hālga ‘a holy person, saint’: 950 1647
fæder ‘father’: 4,100	hæpen ‘heathen’: 950
bisceop ‘bishop’: 3,700	hell, helle ‘the underworld; Hell’: 900
gāst, gæst ‘breath; air; spirit of God’: 3,100	god-spell ‘Gospel’: 900
ēce adj. ‘perpetual, eternal’: 3,100	a1250 / c1300 dēman ‘to judge; condemn’: 900 1609
dēofol ‘the devil; an evil spirit’: 2,500	clæne ‘clean; unblemished; innocent’: 900
fēond ‘enemy, foe; devil’: 2,300	bliss, blīps ‘bliss, joy; benevolence’: 900
engel ‘angel’: 2,250	bodian ‘to announce, prophecy; preach’ 850 c1175 / a1225
eall-mihtig, æl-mihtig ‘almighty’: 2,000	god-cund ‘divine; spiritual’: 800 c1275(?a1200)
dōm ‘judgement; justice’: 2,000	ge-brōpor ‘brothers; fellowmen, monks’: 800 c1300 / a1225
cyrice ‘church; religious community’: 2,000	arce-bisceop ‘archbishop’: 800
brōpor ‘brother; fellowman; monk’: 2,000	ge-hælan ‘to heal; save; hail’: 775 (+ hælan 450) ?1847

ā-rīsan ‘to rise (from the dead); increase; appear’: 2,000	gāstlic, gæstlic ‘spiritual’: 700
ēadig ‘happy; blessed’: 1,650 a1325(c1250) / c1540(?a1400)	fæstan ‘to fast, abstain’: 650
for-gyfan ‘to give, grant; forgive’: 1,600	gylt ‘offence, sin; debt’: 600
gebed ‘prayer; request’: 1,500 a1225	fulluht, fulwiht ‘baptism’: 600 a1500(?a1400)
hlāford ‘master, ruler; the Lord’: 1,400	dēma ‘judge; Christ’: 600 c1275(?a1200) / c1275(?a1216)
apostol ‘apostle; missionary’: 1,400	ār-lēas ‘shameful; impious; cruel’: 600 c1225
ā-lȳsan ‘to release; redeem’: 1,400 a1425	gehālgod ‘hallowed, consecrated’: 500
ēcnes ‘perpetuity; eternity’: 1,300 ?c1225 / a1300	gebletsod ‘blessed, hallowed’: 500
heofonlic ‘heavenly; divine’: 1,250	āmen ‘amen’: 500

Even though Table 1 gives only a crude picture of high-frequency religious lexemes, with many of them being polysemous and the frequencies of the individual senses subsumed under general counts, it demonstrates unequivocally several important facts about the surviving record of Old English:

- religious lexis constitutes a large portion of high-frequency content words (for comparison, only function words *hē*, *hēo*, *hit*, pron. (taken together, 200,000 occ.), *and*, conj. (172,000), and *bēon*, v. (100,000) have higher counts than *god*, n. (33,000); only *cweþan*, v. (17,500) and *habban*, v. (12,700) have frequencies higher than 10,000; between 10,000 and 5,000 we find *dæg*, n. (9,100), *ān*, num./pron. (9,000), *for*, prep./conj. (9,000), *dōn*, v. (8,900),

cuman, v. (8,600), *cyning*, n. (8,000, with many of those being probably used in the religious sense, too), *be*, prep./conj./adv. (7,600), *æt*, prep./adv. (6,000), *būtan*, adv./prep./conj. (5,600); between 5,000 and 1,000 – *hēr*, adv. (4,100), *gān*, v. (3,700), *hand*, n. (3,700), *hātan*, v. (3,400), *gear*, n. (3,250), *eald*, adj. (3,000), *faran*, v. (2,600), *gōd*, adj. (2,500), *hūs*, n. (2,000), *bōc*, n. (1,750), *drincan*, v. (1,200), *etan*, v. (1,200), *here*, n. (1,150), *full*, adj. (1,100));

- the high counts of religious terms reflect the thematic imbalance of the Old English corpus;
- they have a high survival rate (all 52 lexemes are still attested in Middle English; 36 lexemes (or 69 per cent) survive into present-day English);
- all native-based lexemes (42 out of 52, or 81 per cent) represent either semantic loans, with an extension from secular to religious or from pagan to Christian domain, or loan translations.

From these we can conclude that high frequencies in OE and survival rates in ME correlate and, further, speculate that high frequencies in OE would suggest diachronic, diatopic, diastratal and diaphasic diffusion of these general religious terms already in OE, although the unavailability of statistics per individual sense makes it difficult to trace the exact trajectories of diffusion. Some of these trajectories will be addressed below, as we continue from generalisations to concrete examples.

While it may seem natural and consistent with the observed tendencies that such terms as *god* and *hālig* should survive, it is far less straightforward that such terms as *dryhten* and *hælend* should die out. As the analysis of the first five high-frequency terms on the list will demonstrate, the stories of individual lexemes are more nuanced than the general counts would suggest, whether

they belong to the survivor or the obsolescent category. It is both the former and, especially, the latter categories that merit closer attention.

With 33,000 occurrences in the DOEC (or c.10,880 per million words), *god* continues as the dominant religious term into the ME period. French-derived *deus*, *deu* and *de* are attested only as parts of swear words and interjections: *parde*, *depardeus*; *deu merci*, *deuleset* (Käsmann 1961: 41).

Although *dryhten* is the second most frequent religious word in OE (c.15,500 occurrences; c.5,110 per million words), its use drops already in early ME, but it only becomes obsolete towards 1500 (MED, s.v.). Apparently dominant in OE, *dryhten* encounters a powerful competitor in *hlāford* (c.1,400 occ.; c.462 per million words). In spite of its higher frequencies, the former is restricted to either poetry or, especially in late OE, to religious contexts, while the latter can refer to both ‘feudal lord’ and ‘the Lord’ without any genre or register restrictions. Käsmann relates the eventual demise of *dryhten* with its lack of semantic connection to the secular feudal world and its hierarchy (1961: 42). In LAEME the comparative distribution of the two lexemes becomes markedly different: *lord* scores 1,795 (c.2,767 per million words), while *dryhten* only 531 (c.818 per million words); moreover, *sir(e)* enters this semantic domain as early as c.1200 (*Ancrene Riwe*) and features 109 times in the corpus (of these only 23 are used as titles). Käsmann observes that the expansion of *lord* at the expense of *dryhten* is paralleled in the history of German: *herro* ousts *truhtin* as both ‘feudal lord’ and ‘the Lord’ (1961: 42–43). Although LAEME Maps function does not allow us to distinguish between the distributions of the sense ‘the Lord’ as opposed to ‘feudal

lord’,⁴ mapping the three lexemes seems nevertheless meaningful, especially considering that religious bias is present in LAEME,⁵ too (Figure 1).

We can see that in many parts of England *dryhten* can still be used alongside *lord* and even alongside *lord* and *sir*. It serves very rarely as the only option, however, and alternation between *dryhten* and *sir* seems to be impossible. The innovation of *sir* is more pronounced in the West Midlands and the North, although the denser coverage for the West Midlands is a notorious problem in Middle English dialectology (Laing 2000; Laing & Lass 2007a: §1.3; Gardner 2014: 42–43; and my discussion below).

⁴ Grammel tag ‘n-t’ makes it possible to observe that *sir* is used much more often in titles (*sir* + name) than the other two lexemes: 23 tokens out of 109, compared to *dryhten* 9 tokens out of 531 and *lord* 28 tokens out of 1,795 (cf. Käsmann 1961: 44).

⁵ Various religious genres and Bible translations and commentaries constitute over 500,000 words or 79 per cent of the corpus (Gardner 2014: 44–45).

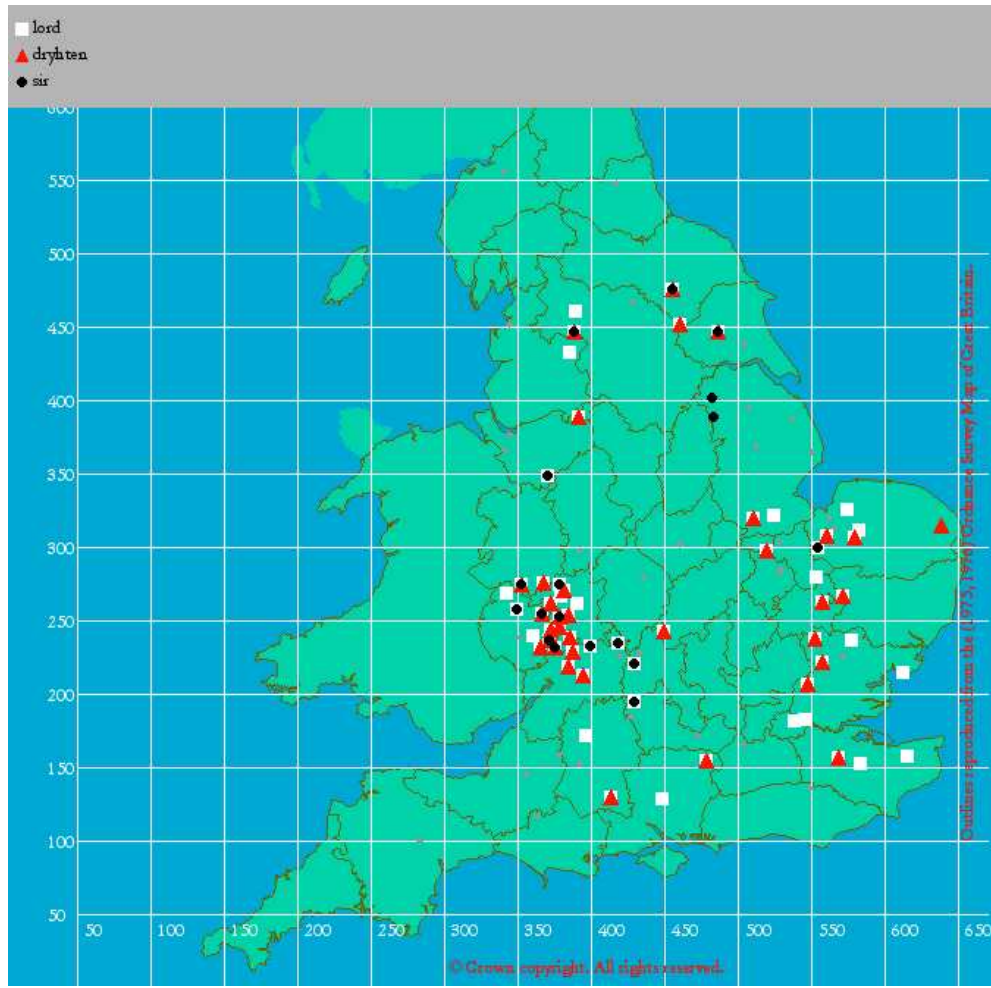


Figure 1. Geographical distribution of *lord*, *dryhten*, and *sir* in LAEME

Käsmann's observation that *dryhten* becomes obsolete in secular senses in all OE texts except poetry deserves closer consideration (1961: 42; the DOE s.v. *dryhten* points to the same conclusion). This would suggest that *dryhten* was a marked poetic, typically non-secular, term as early as late OE, which greatly reduced its survival chances into later periods. The German cognate *truhtin* seems to tell the same story. Perhaps it was precisely for their elevated connotations that these, probably archaic, terms were chosen or even reanimated in both languages. Diachronically, however, they were unable to resist the pressure of their unmarked synonyms.

The term that features third on the list, *hālig*, with 8,400 occurrences in OE (c.2,770 per million words), remains frequent in early ME: it occurs 1,476 times in LAEME (c.2,275 per million words) and is clearly dominant as an adjective (cf. only 3 attestations of the lexel *saint* as an adjective). *hālig* is never used with names of saints, however, this function being restricted to various reflexes of the Latin *sanctus* – *sanct*, *sant*, *san*, *seint* (tagged as a noun-title ‘n-t’ in LAEME, including abbreviations). The lexel *saint* is attested 1,164 times as a noun-title but only 22 times as a noun in its own right (cf. Käsman 1961: 62–64), in which function the reflex of the OE noun *hālg* (c.950 occ. in DOEC; c.313 per million words) is still more frequent – 88 attestations (c.136 per million words) in LAEME – becoming obsolete only after 1500 (MED, s.v. *halwe*). The functional distribution is thus apparent: *hālig* is used only as an adjective, *hālg* only as a noun, and the reflexes of *sanctus* are strongly preferred as titles.

Two nomina sacra come next on the DOEC list: *crist* (c.5,500 occ.; c.1,813 per million words) and *hælend* ‘Saviour, Jesus’ (c.5,000 occ.; c.1,648 per million words). *crist* is used 1,387 times in LAEME (c.2,137 per million words), typically in <crist> spellings, <ch> surfacing only in abbreviations. The history of the loan translation is much more complex, however.

Ælfric, who relied on the established vernacular tradition, grounded in the Gospels (Matthew 1.21), Jerome’s *Liber Interpretationis Hebraicorum Nominum*, and Isidore’s *Etymologies* (vii.2), explained the meaning of the name *Jesus* as follows:

- (1) Iesus is ebreisc nama. þæt is on leden Saluator. and on englisc Hælend. (ÆCHom II, 12.2 (122.420))

‘*Iesus* is a Hebrew name, that is in Latin *Saluator* and in English *Hælend*’

Accordingly, the collocation *Hælend Crist* for ‘Jesus Christ’ is extremely common in OE (over 500 occurrences, of these more than 200 in Ælfric). It is not limited to West Saxon, however, featuring also in the North, for example, in the interlinear glosses to the *Lindisfarne Gospels*, nor to the Bible and biblical commentary, occurring, e.g., in liturgical texts and charters.⁶ The use of the name *Jesus* <Iesus, Ihesus> is, in contrast, very rare (cf. OED s.v. *Jesus*) and, for the most part, restricted to the explanatory passages, such as the one quoted in example (1). Although, when used on its own, *Hælend* is typically preceded by a demonstrative, its status remains somewhere between a common noun and a proper name. This is why its demise in early ME should be examined next to the rise in the use of both *saviour* and *Jesus*.

Unfortunately, mapping proper names is not possible with LAEME, as they are not treated as lexels, so Figure 2 represents only those text languages that use *Helend* (148 occ. in 24 texts) and *saviour* (1 occ. in # 295, MS Cotton Vespasian A.iii containing a version of *Cursor Mundi* and other religious poems, dated to C14a). Thanks to the kind assistance of the LAEME team I was able to obtain a list of all proper names from the corpus.⁷ I then manually selected all instances of *Jesus* and checked the files that contained it for date and localisation.

Although still more frequent in the late 12th century (Figure 3), its relative portion being just over 50 per cent compared to *Jesus*, *Helend* is probably construed less and less as a proper name, as the collocations with *Christ* are not numerous (seven altogether in 5 texts: ## 301, 1200,

⁶ Cf., respectively, these bilingual examples: *Initium euangelii ihesu christi fili dei* fruma godspelles **hælendes crist** sunu godes. (MkGl (Li) 1.1); *Domine Ihesu Christe adoro te in cruce ascendentem*. Drihten **hælend crist** ic bidde ðe on rode astigende (Lit 4.4.1 (Hughes) 3); *Regnante in perpetuum domino nostro Iesu Christo*. <Rixiendum> urum Drihtne **hælendum Criste** on ecnysse (Ch 1032 (Rob 120) 1).

⁷ I am particularly grateful to Vasilis Karaiskos who extracted all proper names from LAEME corpus files for me and to Margaret Laing who explained how abbreviated forms of *Jesus* are treated in expansions.

1300, C12b2; # 184, C13; # 246, C13b1). Explanations similar to that given in example 1 above are also found in early homily collections, the *Trinity* (# 1200, C12b2) and *Lambeth Homilies* (# 2001, c.1200), which are well-known for their close kinship with the OE homiletic tradition (Swan & Treharne, eds. 2000), e.g. in this commentary on the Creed:

(2) & in *ihesum christum*. and ich ileue on þe **helende crist**. *filium eius unicum*. his enlepi sune. *dominum nostrum*. ure lauerd he is ihaten **helende** for he moncun heledde of þan depliche atter. (# 2001, Morris 1868: 75)

‘& in *ihesum christum*. and I believe in Jesus Christ. *filium eius unicum*. his only son. *dominum nostrum*. our lord. He is called *helende* because he has healed mankind from the deadly poison.’

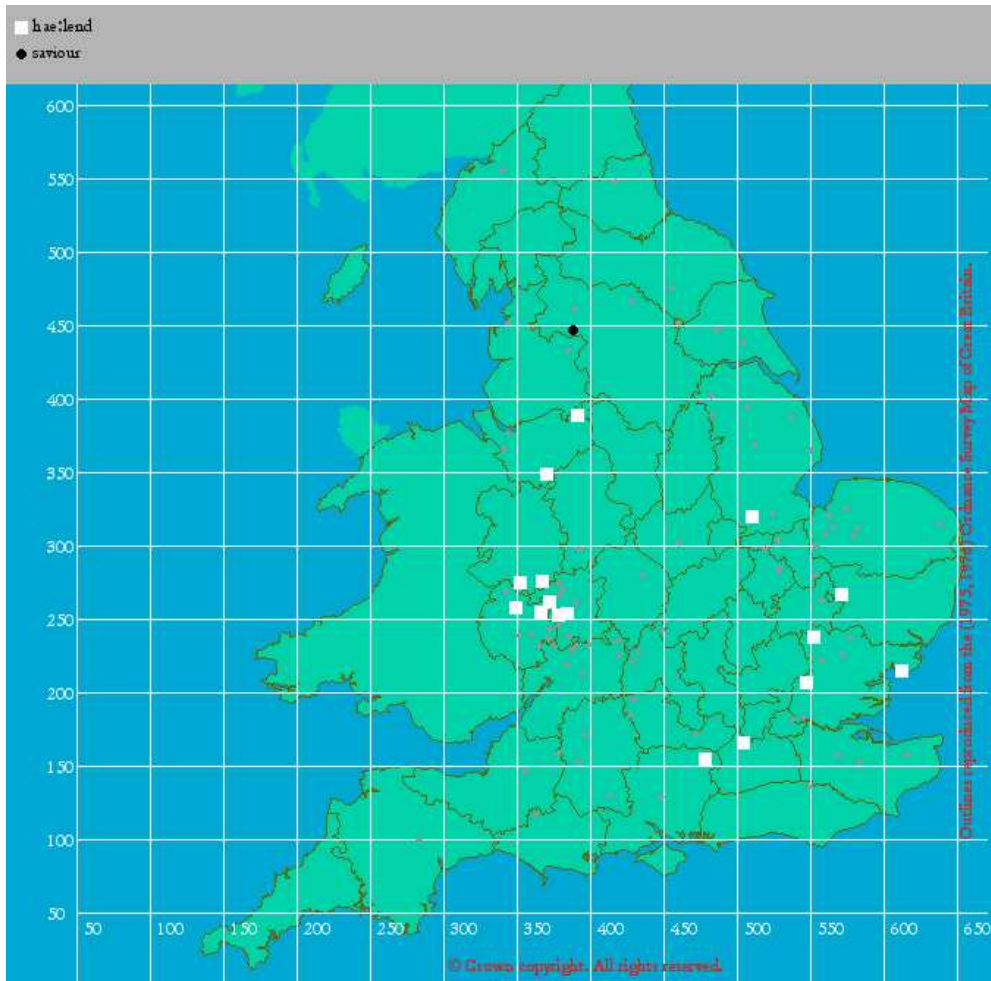


Figure 2. Geographical distribution of *hælend* vs. *saviour* in LAEME

It is illuminating that the scribe of # 2001 is still able to pick up the word play: healer/saviour who has healed/saved us from poison/corruption. The etymological relationship between the verb *helen* and *helende crist* was probably lost upon the scribe of # 1200, for he uses *alesede* ‘delivered, redeemed’ in his version of the commentary (cf. Käsmann 1961: 154).

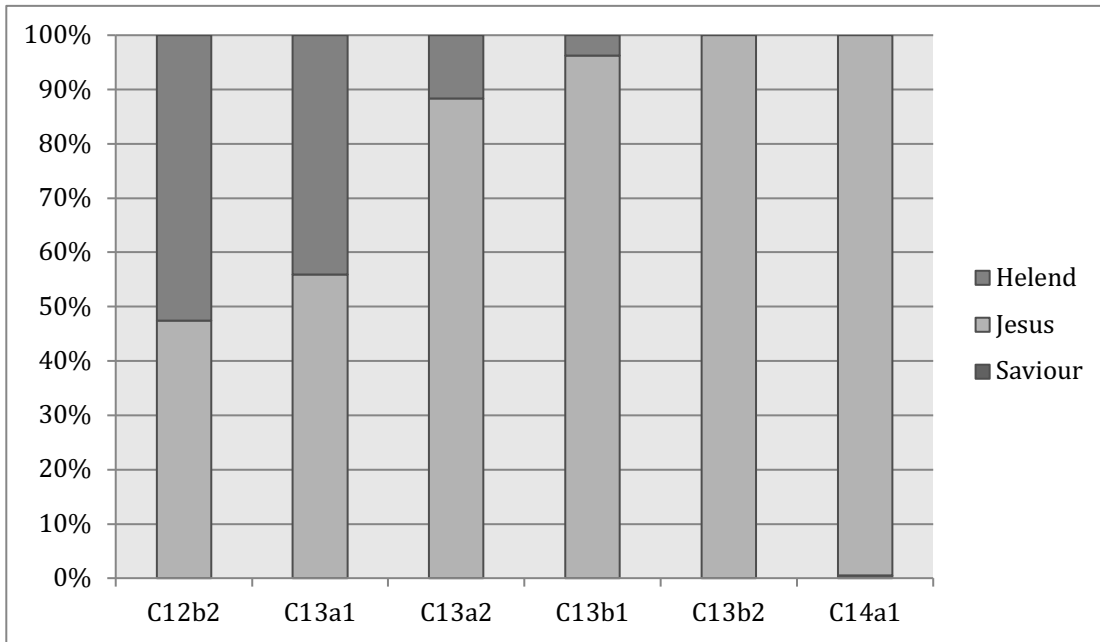


Figure 3. Relative frequencies of *Helend*, *Jesus*, and *Saviour* between late 12th and early 14th century

From the early 13th century, *Jesus*, typically in the form <Iesu> from French (Käsmann 1961: 51; OED s.v. *Jesus*), if at all spelt out (28 per cent of occurrences), or in the form <IHU>, if abbreviated, gains increasingly more ground, ousting *Helend* completely by the end of the century. It is soon after this that *Saviour* is introduced from French. Käsmann connects the demise of *Helend* with its obsolescent morphology: indeed, all reflexes of OE agent nouns in *-end* die out in the course of the early ME period, e.g., *alesend* ‘redeemer’ or *sheppend* ‘creator’ (1961: 51). Although morphological unanalysability is an important concern, I would argue that its semantic and categorical arbitrariness was at least an equally valid factor. Again, we are dealing with a marked lexeme, with special connotations, belonging to a high register. Its juxtaposition with the verb *heal* (OE *hælan*), from which *hælend* was derived, is revealing. Its ME reflex *hēlen* is a polysemous and unmarked verb, which means ‘to cure, heal; become healed; reform, improve, save’ (MED, s.v.). As example (2) shows, these senses can still trigger an educated pun, which probably suggests that

the connection between the verb and its derivative was no longer straightforward for more ordinary speakers, who could not easily associate a ‘healer, leech’ with ‘reformer, improver’ and ‘saviour’. The obsolescent morphological make-up of *Helend* made things even more ambiguous. Moreover, a special devotion to the holy name of Jesus that was developing in the 13th century under Franciscan influence (Renevey *fc.*) and the increasingly more expected practice of the recitation of the Creed and Articles of Faith by laymen (Reeves 2015), could have contributed to the marginalisation of *Helend* as a sacred name, making its usage in prayers archaic and unwanted.

All in all, word counts in OE are a good predictor of survival in ME, provided high-frequency terms are unmarked in ME. This finding is illustrated by several maps below: of *doom* (vs. *judgement*) and *heathen* (vs. *paien* and *saracen*), taken from the 500+ list (Figure 4), and of *god-spellere*, (c.270 occurrences in OE; vs. *evangelist*) and *witega* (c.450 occurrence in OE; vs. *prophet*).

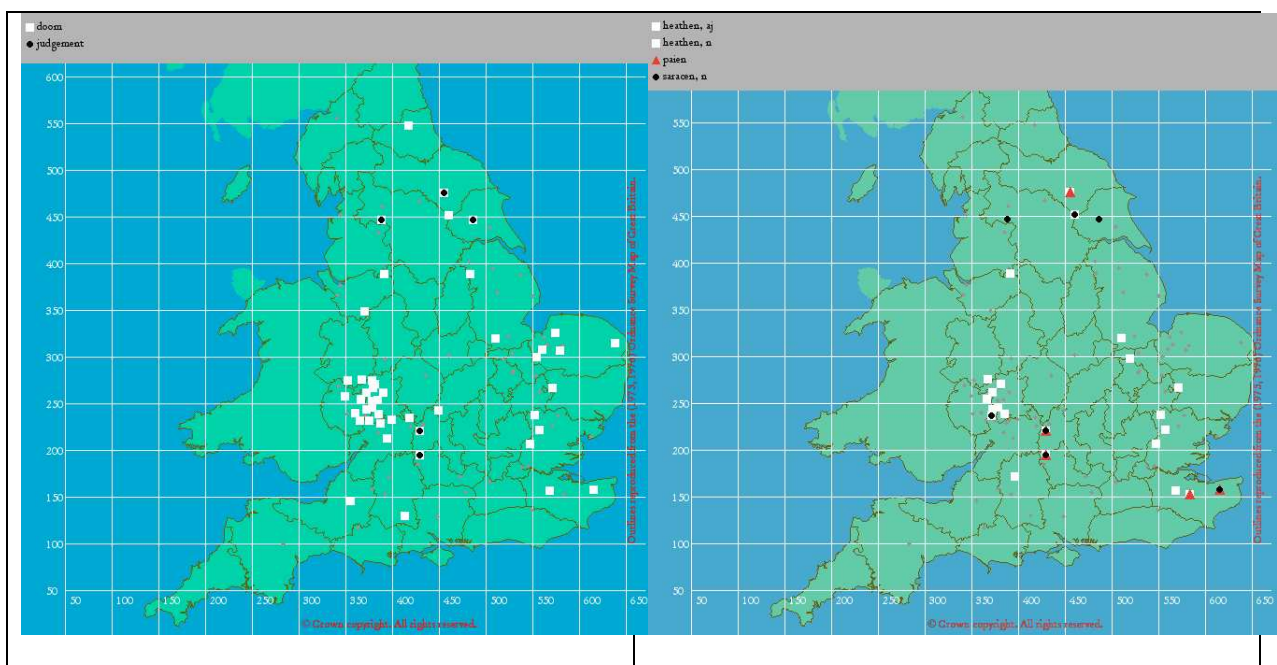


Figure 4. Geographical distribution of high-frequency terms *doom* vs. *judgement* (left) and *heathen* vs. *paien* and *saracen* (right) in LAEME

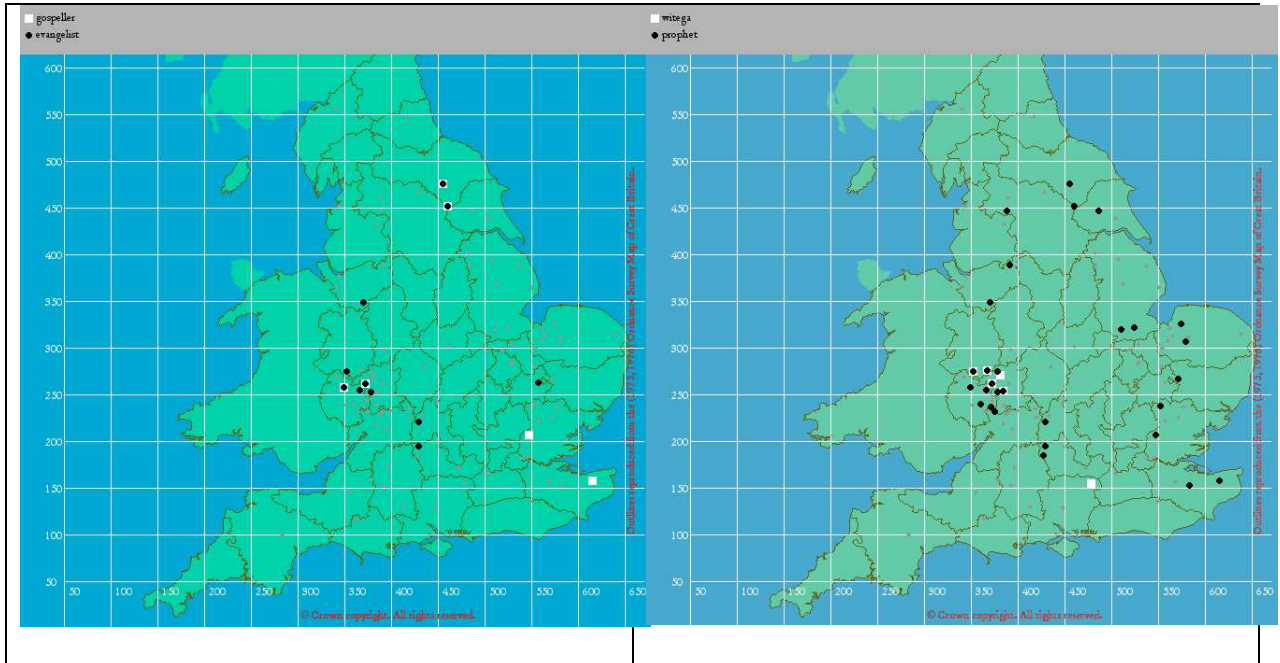


Figure 4. Geographical distribution of lower-frequency terms *gospeller* vs. *evangelist* (left) and *witega* vs. *prophet* (right) in LAEME

My last illustration attempts to relate lexical change to social innovation more generally. We have seen in the case study of *Helend* that the changes introduced into devotional practices in the 13th century may have contributed to the demise of this lexeme. Likewise, we would expect ecclesiastical innovation to be reflected in the growth of the lexicon (explored more fully in section 2.4).

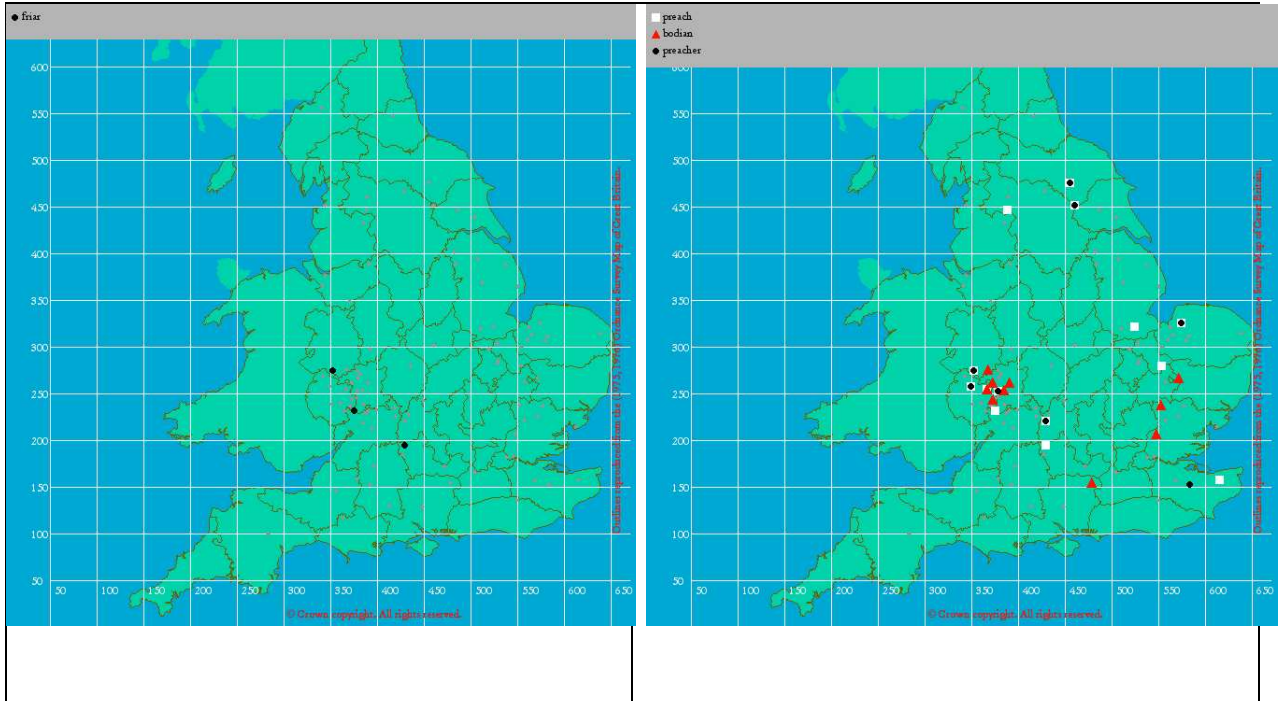


Figure 5. Geographical distributions of *friar* (left) and *preach*, *preacher* vs. *bodian* in LAEME

Figure 5 shows the geographical distribution of *friar* (22 tokens, attested from C13b2 on) and of *to preach* (89 tokens from C13a2 on), *preacher* (14 tokens from C13a2 on) as opposed to *bodian* ‘to preach’ (30 tokens until C13b2). As ‘friar’ was a new concept whose introduction into medieval English society had an immediate impact on the lexicon (Wenzel 1983; Durkin 2009: 3–7), the expansion of *preach* at the expense of *bodian* from the second quarter of the 13th century appears to be closely related to the innovation of *friar*. The two lexemes can be pinned down to the same survey points in the West Midlands and South West, and their spread may have gone hand in hand in other regions, too. It is quite possible that there was also a semantic association between the new style of *preaching* and the mendicant orders, while *bodian* and *bodung*, although expected of the parish priests, was taken as something different and gradually fell into disuse. The relation between social innovation, geography and lexical changes is explored in the remaining sections.

2.2 Maps explained in more detail

The distribution maps that we have seen are not colour-coded for period and need more detailed explanation in relation to ME dialectology and its written record. The tendencies observed are directly related to the regional coverage of LAEME across subperiods of early ME. The word counts per subperiod and dialect area are available in Gardner's (2014) study of ME derivation, which uses LAEME for the early period. Gardner divides corpus files into five subperiods of roughly 40 years (Table 2; for the rationale and advantages of 40-year time frames, see 40–41) and then cross-tabulates diachronic and regional data, distributing LAEME files into the traditional ME dialect groupings.⁸ I reproduce her tables here.

Table 2. *The division of LAEME into five subperiods (from Gardner 2014: 41)*

Subperiod	Dates included	Words N
EMidE I	1150–1190 C12b1, C12b2	53,785
EMidE II	1190–1230 C12b2–C13a1, C13a1, C13a	107,478
EMidE III	1230–1270 C13a2, C13a2–C13b1, C13b1, C13	183,620
EMidE IV	1270–1310 C13b, C13b2, C13b2–C14a1	142,425
EMidE V	1310–1350 C14a1, C14a2, C14a	161,493
Total		648,801

Table 3. *Regional coverage of LAEME across subperiods (from Gardner 2014: 43)*

	EMidE I	EMidE II	EMidE III	EMidE IV	EMidE V
N	0	37	585	372	64,088
WML	999	74,992	131,634	68,201	116
EML	51,980	26,616	2,594	24,543	35,367
SW	806	1,751	15,034	34,303	31,037

⁸ It should be noted that LAEME divides text files into nine dialect areas, distinguishing N = North; NWML = North-West Midlands; CML = Central Midlands; EML = East Midlands; SWML = South-West Midlands; SW = South-West; SC = South Central; Ess&Lon = Essex and London; SE = South-East (Laing 2009: 254).

SE	0	4,049	727	3,223	30,699
Unlocalised	0	33	33,046	11,783	186

Texts from the West Midlands account for the majority of the corpus (c.43 per cent) and dominate numerically in EMidE II, EMidE III, and EMidE IV. East Midland texts (c.22 per cent) are distributed more evenly across subperiods but predominate in EMidE I. The South West (c.13 per cent) is sufficiently covered only from EMidE III onwards, while the North (c. 10 per cent) and the South East (c. 6 per cent) increase in coverage only in EMidE V (percentages are taken from Gardner 2014: 42; for word counts per region, see *ibid.*). Regarding chronology, as we would expect, earlier texts up to c.1200 show more lexical affinity with the OE tradition. Thirteenth-century texts still largely respect OE lexical practice but also display new French terms, texts from c.1300 are increasingly more innovative. Not surprisingly, therefore, many conservative lexical features are observed in the East Midlands (this region providing most of the data for EMidE I) and parts of the West Midlands, while variation between old and new tendencies is typically more pronounced in the West Midlands (dominating EMidE II, EMidE III and EMidE IV), and lexical innovation shows up a lot in the North and South (northern and southern texts, taken together, outnumbering the Midlands in EMidE V, 78 per cent and 22 per cent respectively).

2.3 The West Midlands in the thirteenth century

Even a brief look at LAEME maps and survey points reveals that the West Midlands stands out where the density of coverage is concerned, especially in the north of the dialect area, which includes Gloucestershire, Worcestershire, Herefordshire and southern parts of Shropshire. This is hardly surprising since the intellectual prominence of this part of Mercia in the OE period and the continuity of its pre-1066 literary tradition have long been acknowledged by scholars (Bately 1988;

Millett 2004). For centuries before the Norman Conquest, these counties enjoyed a more intense and more protected cultural life (especially after the beginning of the Viking raids in the late eighth century) than other parts of England. Mercian scholars were instrumental during the Alfredian revival in the 890s, and the bishops of Worcester played key roles during the Benedictine reforms of the tenth century. After the council of Westminster (1070), when a number of English bishops were deposed and many vacancies had already been filled by the Normans, only a few episcopal sees were still administered by the people appointed during the reign of Edward the Confessor. Among them were Walter of Lorraine, bishop of Hereford (in office 1060-79) and Wulfstan, bishop of Worcester (1062-95). Wulfstan's authority was particularly important in the preservation of religious foundations and their archives in the region (Mason 1990). Therefore, when the seeds of new methods and styles of preaching began to spread from the Continent in the second half of the 12th century and especially after 1215, in the West Midlands, they fell on fertile soil. Historical interest in vernacular written texts, a concentration of old cathedral centres and new mendicant houses, the proximity to Oxford, and, critically, the bishops who were active in the pastoral reform, all contributed to the proliferation of literary production in English and the circulation of texts across the region (Millett 2004: 9-10). It is in this context that the *Lambeth Homilies*, *Ancrene Wisse*, the *Katherine* and *Wooing* collections were written and copied, and it is in this context that the Tremulous Hand of Worcester annotated OE manuscripts (Laing 2000: 108; Franzen 1991, 2003).

Although the decisions of the Fourth Lateran Council provided a necessary impetus for the social changes that we observe from the 1220s onwards, i.e. a wider support for grammar schools at cathedral level that could provide basic education for the laity, the increasing availability of English texts for religious instruction and private reading, and the availability of preaching in English that we can deduce from this, the first indications of these developments are already present

decades earlier at both legislative and executive levels. For example, canon 18 of the Third Lateran Council (1179) required every cathedral church to assign a schoolmaster to instruct the clerics of that church and children from poor families for free (Orme 2006: 201-202). Similarly, the programme of popular preaching had been advanced and elaborated in the last quarter of the 12th century by the great Parisian theologians Peter Cantor (d. 1197) and Alan of Lille (d. 1203). The influence of their doctrines can be seen in all texts of the AB language (Millet 2004: 9).

In 1215, a major programme of pastoral reform was launched. The decisions of the Fourth Lateran Council provided for instructors in Latin grammar and “in matters which are recognized as pertaining to the cure of souls” to be appointed by all cathedral churches and other churches with sufficient resources (canon 11). Bishops were expected to recruit preachers to help them “minister the Word of God to the people” in large dioceses and assist with “hearing confessions and enjoining penances” (canon 10). At the same time, Christians of both sexes were obliged to confess their sins and receive the Communion at least once a year (canon 21). In response to this, “[t]he teaching syllabus evolved by the English bishops ... required the laity to know and be examined on the Creeds, the *Pater Noster*, the Commandments and the Deadly Sins, sometimes supplemented by the Sacraments and later joined by the *Ave Maria*” (Gillespie 2004: 129). It goes without saying that clerical instruction on such a universal scale had to be undertaken in the vernacular. The demand for popular preaching was answered by the existing cathedral and monastic structures, but even more so by the new mendicant orders that were making astonishing progress both on the Continent and in Britain. The Dominicans arrived in 1221 and established their first base at Oxford. The Franciscans followed suit in 1224 and made their urban settlements at Canterbury, London, Oxford, and Northampton. By 1250 both orders already had dozens of foundations across the country, including Franciscan houses in Worcester (1227) and Hereford (1228), and Dominican houses in Shrewsbury (before 1232) and Chester (before 1236) (Bolton

1998: 305; Millett 2004: 10). A well-known reformer, Robert Grosseteste, later also a Franciscan, was active in the diocese of Hereford between 1195 and 1220, and most of the bishops, active in pastoral reform in the West Midlands, were linked to him. Bella Millett observes,

It is possible that these bishops acted as catalysts for a revival of vernacular preaching and devotional literature in the West Midlands, introducing Paris-trained preachers familiar with new techniques and themes but also encouraging the repackaging of older native preaching resources for new purposes. (2004: 10)

A similar repackaging of older native lexical resources for new instructional purposes must have taken place: established frequent terms were preserved, while those associated with changing practices of, e.g. confession and penance, were replaced with French loans (Timofeeva *fc.*).

2.4 Reforms, lexical innovation, and social networks

Establishing the exact connections between linguistic change and social change has been the principal task for historical sociolinguistics, at least since the 1980s (Labov 2001; Milroy 1987; Trudgill 2000; etc.). That rapid and/or large-scale lexical innovation and, especially, adoption of loanwords are indicative of social change is hardly a surprising outcome in this investigation. What needs to be addressed therefore is the question of the social networks that allowed 13th-century lexical innovation to happen, the patterns and conditions that defined its speed.

The reform movement of the late 12th–early 13th century can be seen as the major driving force behind the introduction of new Romance-based religious terms in Middle English. Innovative lexical tendencies are more observable in the West Midlands because the initial stages of the new social developments and textual attestation were also more pronounced in this region. At the same

time, both Midland areas show a stronger connection to the OE written tradition and its religious vocabulary.

With grammar-school education being typically available via the French medium, the higher schools and universities functioning in both Latin and French (Orme 1973: 71–78; Ingham this volume), and francophone schoolmasters and friars being more readily present in urban centres, we would expect lexical innovation to diffuse in episcopal and university cities and other large and rich towns that maintained grammar schools. Those immediately affected were the children of the nobility and social climbers who attended these schools (cf. Richter 1979), but public preaching could also reach much broader audiences. Friars, Franciscans in particular, more mobile and resourceful, were trained to preach in a variety of situations – in “the cloisters, market squares, gardens, preaching crosses and other open places; ... at fairs” – and in more than one language – “in the vernacular, French and Anglo-Norman with Latin as the medium for clerical and scholastic congregations” (Robson 2017b: 20). Because friars created their own system of school and university education (O’Carroll 1980; Bolton 1998), they were less dependent on the old written tradition in general and freer to generate new linguistic norms. In the latter process, common English terminology was naturally preserved, while rare and ambiguous terms were rejected. Considering that many friars travelled a lot both locally and across the country, it is easy to envisage how their French-influenced linguistic practices would spread together with them through preaching, charity work, and spiritual ministrations. Moving easily among people of all social standing (Robson 2017a: 456–457), they would also provide the necessary weak ties for the diffusion of new religious lexis both within and across social classes, including the very low and marginalised. Given the extent of their geographical and social mobility and the extent of multilingualism and language fluency expected from them, it is understandable why the introduction of French terms was often preferable to the reanimation of old or the creation of new

lexical items in English. Not only could it facilitate less taxing code alternation between English, French and Latin on the part of the preachers, but also allow for a kind of lexical standardisation across the three (and possibly more) codes, if important terminology could be kept ‘stable’, that is to say, Romance.

3 CONCLUSIONS

The religious terminology inherited from the Old English period falls into two categories: 1) established terms that had belonged to the West Saxon standard and were still preserved in general use after 1066 among the lower regular clergy, parish priests, and the faithful at large, and 2) terms of limited currency that had failed to spread outside local communities with strong ties and monastic usage, and survived for some time in smaller religious foundations. The OE word counts are normally a safe predictor of whether a particular lexeme belonged to one or the other category, with many local norms becoming obsolescent already in OE.⁹ In rural communities, the general type probably sufficed for a long time, but urban communities were more ambitious and more exposed to new types of religious instruction, francophone clergymen, and the fruits of education in general (cf. Millett 2004: 13).

Lexical innovation in the religious domain was largely brought about and conditioned by the new standards and styles of preaching and new devotional practices that began to develop in Europe in the late 12th century and reached momentum in the 1220s and 30s. In the 13th century, the rate of lexical growth was unprecedented (Dekeyser 1986) and the rate of semantic expansion was the highest in the ME period (Coleman 1995). Preachers of the new type were the multilingual

⁹ E.g., Timofeeva (2017b) shows that a term of the general type, *martyr*, was replacing synonymous *cȳþere* and *þrowere* associated with Winchester norms in late OE (cf. Godden 1980). Käsmann reports that neither *cȳþere* nor *þrowere* were attested in ME.

innovators who generated new lexis in English and at the same time were instrumental in its diffusion, serving as weak ties between the various levels of the medieval society. Urban middle classes were the most likely English-speaking early adopters of new norms, as they often had productive competence in French (Richter 1979), although not necessarily in ecclesiastical French, while lower urban and rural classes would adopt new norms at a later stage, their competence in ecclesiastical English being probably receptive rather than productive (see Ingham this volume) but activated often enough in church and other public places. In this situation, the preachers also relied a lot on the general stock of OE religious lexis – on established, frequent and diffused terms – provided they were not in conflict with the new devotional practices, as *Helend* seems to have become, with polysemous and unmarked lexemes within this category having an even higher chance of survival.

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